Religious reasons in the public sphere: an empirical study of religious actors' argumentative patterns in Swiss direct-democratic campaigns

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Abstract:

The "going public" of religious actors is taking central stage both in religious studies and political philosophy. But this "going public" of religious actors is controversial. The debate revolves around the question whether religious actors must frame their religious convictions in terms of secular reason or whether they should be allowed to introduce religiously grounded beliefs into public political argument without any constraints. Despite vigorous and ongoing debate, systematic and empirical research on this question has lagged behind. This article focuses on the public statements of religious actors in the context of Swiss direct democratic votes on abortion and immigration. Our empirical findings reveal an interesting gap: on the one hand, many political philosophers and religious thinkers have moved to a position where religious actors can – and even should - openly employ religious arguments, the practice of religious actors in Switzerland is different. Especially the large denominations of Catholics and Protestants have a tendency to use a large amount of secular vocabulary. In addition, our findings also reveal that the use of religious or secular reason varies considerably according to different issues, different media types (religious vs. secular press), different religious traditions, and different media genres, while there is no clear time trend.

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I. Introduction

The "going public" of religious actors is taking central stage both in religious studies and political philosophy. As Casanova (1994) has observed, there is a "deprivatisation" process of religion in Western societies with religious actors going public and becoming normal civic actors advocating their cause. But this "going public" of religious actors is controversial. The debate in political philosophy revolves around the question whether religious actors must frame their religious convictions in terms of secular reason, the classical liberal view, or whether they should be allowed to introduce religiously grounded beliefs into public political argument without any constraints, the communitarian and post-classical liberal view (see Rawls, 1993; Audi, 2000; Wolterstorff, 1997; Weithman, 2002; Habermas, 2006). Recent years have seen a shift in direction of a post-classical liberal and communitarian view which advocates a politics of non-restriction and even promotes the use of religious reasons in the public sphere.

Despite vigorous and ongoing debate, systematic and empirical research on this question has lagged behind. Our article seeks to change this. We focus on the public statements of religious actors in the context of Swiss direct democratic votes on abortion and immigration. Our article has a dual focus: on the one hand, we analyse how often religious actors refer to religious or secular reasons when making public statements in the public sphere (in selected daily newspapers as well as in the religious press). This will enable us to test whether a liberal frame prevails in that religious actors predominantly use secular reasons in public debate or, whether a post-liberal and communitarian frame prevails in that religious actors predominantly use religious reasons. On the other hand, we want to go beyond a simple inventory and also study the antecedents which drive the use of religious vs. secular reasons of religious actors in the public sphere. We focus on five factors that may affect argumentative patterns of religious actors in the public sphere: different issues (abortion vs. immigration), different communication channels (religious vs. secular press and different media genres), different religious groups (with different theological traditions), different actors within religious groups (internal diversity of religious denominations), and different times (changes in argumentative patterns between the 1970s and 2000s). In so doing, we aim at a more nuanced understanding of how religious actors argue in the public sphere. In order to distinguish between religious and secular arguments, we created an indicator which measures whether a statement contains an explicit "religious marker" such as reference to God, Jesus, or Bible. In addition, we also created an indicator which measures the degree of explicit religiosity. We analyzed about 800 public statements of religious actors in fifteen direct-democratic votes in Switzerland in the period from 1970-2007.

Our empirical results reveal an interesting gap: while many political philosophers and religious thinkers have moved to a post-classical liberal position where religious actors can – and even should - openly employ religious arguments, the practice of religious actors in Switzerland is different. Especially the large denominations of Catholics and Protestants use a large amount of secular arguments in direct democratic votes, a trend which has even slightly accelerated in the past decade. We think that this gap between philosophical

aspirations and real world practice must spur reflection both in the camp of philosophers and in the camp of religious actors (and religious campaigners). Both camps need to re-think of how argumentation modes of religious actors *should* look like – and how they *can* look like under the constraints of real world politics.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section II gives more background on the debate between classic liberals vs. post-classic liberals and communitarians regarding the proper use of religious and secular reasons in the public sphere. Section III translates these theoretical ideas into empirical research and describes our theoretical approach regarding the differential use of religious and secular reasons of religious actors. Section IV operationalizes the dependent variable (religious vs. secular reasons) and the predictor variables, discusses the statistical method, and presents the empirical results. Section V concludes and discusses the normative and practical implications of our findings.

II. The *Going Public* of Religious Groups

Contemporary Western societies confront two parallel trends in the field of religion. On the one hand, there is a trend for secularization in the Western world (with the exception of the United States; see e.g., Pollack, 2003; 2009; Bruce, 2002; Dobbelaere, 2002). Some authors also emphasise religious individualisation and privatisation (see Luckmann 1967; Gabriel, 1996; Davie, 1994; 2000; Hervieu-Léger, 1999). Religion retreats to the private sphere, leading to a diffuse and partly non-Christian religiosity. On the other hand, there is a parallel trend of a religious "recurrence". José Casanova (1994) depicts this as the "de-privatization" of religion which is coupled with the "going public" of established religious communities.

While religious sociologists have been taken aback by the self-confidence of religious actors in the public sphere, the *going public* of religious actors has also sparked a controversial debate in political philosophy. The contentious point is whether and how religious communities should bring their religious convictions into the public sphere. The starting point of the debate is John Rawls's (1993) conception of political liberalism with its two core principles of "public reason" and "duty of civility". According to Rawls, the two principles require that democratic citizens owe each other justifications based on reasons that everyone can understand and reasonably accept. This implies a *translation proviso* for religious convictions. In Rawls's words: "The first is that reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support." (Rawls 1993: 217) As Lafont (2007: 241) points out, there is some ambiguity in Rawls's writings about the exact status of comprehensive doctrines and political reasons in the public sphere. Rawls seems to be open toward the use of reasons related to comprehensive doctrines in the public sphere, especially when it comes to argumentations of citizens. But, as Lafont (2007: 242)

notes, even in his latest discussions of the issue, Rawls eventually gives priority to the principle of public reason: "when a stand-off occurs, citizens simply invoke grounding reasons of their comprehensive views, the principle of reciprocity is violated." A number of other prominent liberal philosophers have aired similar thoughts. Robert Audi (2000), for instance, argues that religious reasons in the public sphere are legitimate only if they combine with convincing secular reasons: "one has a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reasons for this advocacy or support". (p. 86)[2]

The banning of religious arguments from the public sphere has met with resistance from several prominent religious thinkers. As Wolterstorff (1997: 170) argues, religious actors should be free to present their religious arguments in public discussion: "[T]he ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy imposes no restrictions on the reasons people offer in their discussion of political issues in the public square". Similarly, Weithmann (2002: 121) holds: "Citizens of a liberal democracy may offer arguments in public political debate which depend upon reasons drawn from their comprehensive moral views, including their religious views, without making them good by appeal to other arguments". If they find majorities for their religious arguments, this must be considered democratic.

According to the advocates of no restriction, there are several reasons why religious arguments should be given unconstrained access to public discourse. First, religious arguments may not be more divisive than secular arguments. According to Lawrence Solum (1990: 1083), "[c]onditions in modern democracies may be so far from the conditions that gave rise to the religious wars of the sixteenth century that we no longer need to worry about religious divisiveness as a source of substantial social conflict." Second, there is no reason to believe that religious reasons cannot contribute to a reasonable public discourse. For Stephen Carter (1993), the opposite is actually true: "our political culture cannot be truly deliberative unless we let ourselves be tested by religiously grounded moral beliefs." (p. 240) Third, religion still plays an influential role in the life of many citizens see Perry, 2001). In this regard, Wolterstorff points out that for religious believers religious faith constitutes a source of energy that nourishes and invigorates their lives. Thus, religious arguments may exert a persuasive force for a significant number of citizens in a democracy. Fourth, the role of (abstract) philosophical arguments in public discourse is questionable. As Wolterstorff (1997: 177) puts it: "What has been rushed in to fill the void is not noble discussions about principles of justice which have been extracted in Rawlsian fashion from the consensus populi. For nobody cares about principles of justice thus obtained. What has been rushed in to fill the void is mainly considerations of economic self-interest, of privatism, and of nationalism." Fifth, religion can provide public conversation with much needed resources. It can point to elements of the secular worldview which have undisclosed and unrecognized metaphysical backgrounds and interests; moreover, religious actors may tap into

[2] Notice that Audi accepts that certain religious convictions cannot be translated into secular language. However, such convictions remain partial convictions and do not satisfy political decisions that entail universal reach (Audi 2000: 86-100).

important themes of religiously-based social criticism (Perry, 2001). Sixth, religious institutions fulfil crucial functions for society. With an eye on the United States, Coleman (2001) argues that religious institutions generate more social capital than any other institution. Consequently, "[e]ven a ‚secularist' … might plausibly desire a more public role of churches in our civic society, precisely because of the ‚secular' spin-off churches provide: greater volunteering; greater contributions to public civic organisations and charities; greater voting behavior." (Coleman, 2001: 284-85)

In a recent essay, Jürgen Habermas (2006) has proposed a "friendly amendment" to a politics of restriction. Like other commentators, Habermas points out that Rawls's conception of public reason is too restrictive. In his view, the liberal state cannot expect that all citizens justify their positions independent of their religious convictions. In particular, since the liberal state institutionally privileges secular reasons the translation proviso puts an asymmetric burden on religious citizens and religious actors. At the same time, Rawls's translation proviso can force religious citizens to misrepresent their cause: they may be forced to publicly state reasons which do not conform to their true religious convictions. In order to preserve the integrity of the religious existence, Habermas allows – and even calls - religious citizens to use religious vocabulary reasons instead of translating their claims into a philosophical pseudo-language. Finally, Habermas thinks that secular citizens can also learn from religious convictions if the latter contain normative claims and truths that relate to the secular sphere as well. Religion can act as an inspiration source for secular philosophy, especially within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Moreover, religion can convey moral insights in a way that philosophy cannot. This reiterates Wolterstorff's (1997) claim that religious reasoning is frequently more accessible to citizens than the deployment of (abstract) philosophical principles. However, Habermas's "friendly amendment" has clear limits. Habermas strongly opposes proposals that promote the use of religious arguments in processes of democratic legislation and decision-making on the ground that it violates the discursive character of such deliberations. As such, it is unclear whether Habermas would permit the massive use of religious reasons by organized religious actors (such as the Catholic Church) in campaigns prior to a direct democratic vote. At the same time, Habermas does not seem to be in strict opposition to the more frequent use of religious reasons in the public sphere.

In sum, the current trend in political philosophy clearly goes in direction of allowing religious reason in public discourse (with more or less restrictions with regard to political decision-making). Our overall conclusion of this review of arguments in favour and against the translation requirement is that the scholarly debate might be improved if the philosophical models are submitted to systematic and wide-ranging empirical investigations. So far, few scholars have taken the trouble to take an in-depth look at actual patterns of argumentation of religious actors (exceptions are, for instance, Kettell, 2009; Klemp 2010). We think that matters cannot be resolved at the level of theoretical stipulation alone, with little recourse to empirical evidence beyond illustrative anecdotes.

III. Empirical Translations

In the following, we shall engage in a systematic analysis of religious and secular arguments in the context of selected Swiss direct democratic votes. Switzerland represents an excellent locus to study religious argumentation in the public sphere. First, Switzerland has direct democratic votes which enable citizens to decide upon specific issues. This, in turn, creates incentives for religious groups to "go public" when their interests and beliefs are affected, trying to influence the voting behaviour of their own members as well as of the larger public. Second, Switzerland also involves a great variety of religious groups and actors, ranging from Catholics, Protestants, Christ-Catholics to free Churches (including evangelical groups), Jewish groups, and Muslims. This religious plurality will not only give us a broad picture of how religious actors argue in the public sphere, it will also enable us to explore differences in argumentative modes of different religious groups. Finally, studying argumentation modes of religious actors in Swiss direct democratic votes has two methodological advantages as well: on the one hand, direct democratic votes entail highly institutionalized political campaigns with a clear time frame (start and end of the campaign); on the other hand, since democratic votes are issue-specific, one can study the deployment of religious and secular reasons in the context of clearly-delineated issues. Conversely, if we analysed different issues in the context of elections and election campaigns, we would confront the methodological problem that issue-specificity is much more blurred (since most elections have multi-issue agendas).

A first focus of our study will be to analyze whether and how often religious actors refer to religious or secular reasons when making public statements. Hereby, we evaluate whether religious actors adopt the classical liberal position and predominantly use secular reasons in the public sphere; or whether a post-classical liberal and communitarian view prevails in that religious actors predominantly use religious reasons in the public sphere.

A second focus of our study is to analyze the antecedents of religious and secular reasons in the public sphere. In so doing, we go beyond a simple inventory of different argumentation modes. We want to better understand the mechanisms underlying the use of religious vs. secular reasons of religious actors. Of course, if all religious actors argued in a uniform way in the public sphere (e.g., if religious actors only used religious reasons), then there would be no need to study the mechanisms of differential modes of argumentation. But a glimpse at our data reveals that there is considerable variation to be explored.

We start from the assumption that political discourse is largely strategic. We expect that religious actors are strategic campaigners in direct democratic votes and try to influence the vote choices of their members as well as of the larger public. This is also in line with the "framing" literature (see Sniderman and Theriault, 2004: 158; for an excellent overview see Hänggli, 2010). This literature assumes that by appropriately framing an issue, actors in the public sphere attempt to construct the meaning of the reality in order to enhance support for their own point of view. Frames selectively draw attention to

certain aspects of the topic under discussion and "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993: 52). Strategic framers adapt their framing choices to specific circumstances and calculate respective costs and benefits. With regard to religious vs. secular argumentation, we expect that different contexts (such as different communication channels) affect whether and how often religious actors use religious or secular reasons. Of course, analysing argumentation modes and frames does not end with a purely strategic approach. We think that besides strategic framing choices, ideological and organisational factors will also affect the way of how religious groups argue in the public sphere.

Let us now turn to the concrete contextual, actor-related, and time-specific factors that help us understand under what conditions religious actors use more religious or secular vocabulary.

Context – Issues. Different issues may affect the way of religious actors argue. We expect that value-laden topics (such as abortion) lead to more religious argumentation than other issues (such as immigration). On the one hand, value-laden topics are highly salient for religious actors and touch upon their core values. Thus, religious actors will have a strong incentive to present their value-based position, leading to a more frequent use of religious reasons. On the other hand, when value-laden topics are debated in public, religious actors are ascribed specific moral competencies by society. This combines with the self-understanding of religious groups as value protectors and value generators in society. Again, this might lead religious actors to put a strong prime on their religiosity and their religious traditions.

Context – Media Channels and Media Genres. Different media channels and media genres may matter of how religious groups argue. According to the framing literature, campaigners vary their framing choices on whom they address as well as depending on whether the communication channel is mediated or unmediated (see Hänggli, 2010). In the mediated communication channels, campaigners promote messages which have to pass the selection by journalists. Campaigners must cater the needs and values of journalists. By contrast, unmediated communication channels guarantee campaigns control over the content and form of the message. They allow campaigners to get their "ideal" message to the public unfiltered by media gatekeepers (see Norris et al., 1999). Thus, we expect differences between religious and secular media. In the former, religious groups can present their "ideal" message to like-minded followers whereas in the latter they have an incentive to abide by the (secular) norms of the journalists as well as the wider public sphere. Moreover, religious groups (and particularly their leadership organisations; see below) may have an incentive to explain to their followers how the group's specific positioning on an issue relates to the basic tenets of the group's theology; this is generally accomplished in the context of internal media. Consequently, we expect religious groups to use religious reasons more frequently in their internal media than in the general media. Moreover, the distinction between mediated and unmediated channels also refers to different media genres. We expect that in less mediated channels such as

political ads and letters to the editor religious actors can present their unfiltered - or, less filtered - messages. Conversely, when religious actors present their position in mediated channels (e.g., in the context of media releases or in interviews), they need to abide by the secular values of journalists. Again, we expect religious actors to use religious reasons more frequently in less mediated media genres and secular reasons more frequently in the fully mediated media genres.

Actors - Religious traditions. Arguing in the public sphere entails an ideological dimension as well. When going public, religious actors draw from their own religious traditions. We expect that different theological and religious traditions matter how religious groups argue in the public sphere. In this regard, some religious groups have theological backgrounds that ease the translation of their religious claims into a secular vocabulary, whereas other religious groups have theological backgrounds that hinder such translation efforts. In the Swiss context, religious groups which regularly participate in the public discourse are Catholics, Protestants, Christ-Catholics, Free Churches, and, to a lesser degree, Jewish groups and Muslims. First, the Catholic Church has a strong tradition of “natural” theology. At an ethical level, this traditionally implies a linkage to a natural-rights discourse, leading to an identification of divine and natural law. This identification of divine and natural law might make it easier for the Catholic Church to translate its positions and arguments into secular arguments, while simultaneously keeping its Catholic religiosity (see Schockenhoff, 1996). Conversely, the Protestant Church makes strong reference to its own religious tradition which is strongly geared towards using biblical arguments. This might make it more difficult for Protestant groups to translate their positions and argument into secular arguments. With regard to their theological tradition, Christ-Catholics are somewhat in between the Catholic and the Protestant Church. Evangelical groups, in turn, take biblical texts in a literal sense as well as an authority for any political judgment. This combines with a missionary instruction. Thus, evangelical groups might have a strong tendency to use religious (biblical) arguments in their public statements. Jews and Muslims are religious groups putting a strong prime on their theological traditions, leading them to use religious reasons rather than secular reasons. Finally, we expect less religious argumentation when different religious groups act together with secular groups. When religious actors act together with other religious actors, however, it is more difficult to formulate clear expectations: One strategy to bridge the different theological backgrounds and bring them together in a common organisation or in a common statement is to use a secular frame of argumentation. Conversely, religious groups acting together might also have an incentive to identify themselves as a religious actor and hence use religious markers.

Actors - Internal diversity. It is misleading to speak of religious groups such as “Catholics” or “Protestants” as unified religious actors. Rather, we need to take the internal diversity of religious groups into account. Therefore, we focus on the diverse actors within religious communities, running from leadership organisations to grass-root organisations and associations. In this regard, we expect leadership organisations to use more religious arguments than associations and grass-root organisations. Leadership organisations have a

strong incentive to reinforce and promote the group's religious values whereas associations and grass-root organisations (such as charity organisations) are much more closely aligned with the secular sphere and will therefore utilize a more secular vocabulary.

Time. As mentioned before, most Western societies confront a secularization trend. Thus, society has changed in the past decades, and these societal changes may leave their imprint on the way of religious groups argue. As strategic actors in direct democratic campaigns, religious actors will recognize that messages that resonate with the broader public should be framed in secular rather than purely religious terms. Thus, we expect that in the course of secularization, religious campaigners in direct democratic votes will frequency of strongly religious arguments decreases over time. To be sure, this expectation – based on the strategic framing approach - runs counter to the current trend in political philosophy which advocates a more open use of religious reasons in the public sphere.

IV. Empirical Analysis

Our empirical analysis focuses on two issues in the context of Swiss direct democratic votes, namely abortion and immigration. Both issues have strongly mobilized religious actors. While abortion touches upon a vital concern of religious groups, immigration touches upon religious groups' concern with humanity and solidarity.

With regard to abortion debates, we selected all direct democratic votes at the federal level in the time period from the 1970s to 2000s: "Popular initiative for abortions during the first term"[3] (1977), "Federal Law on the Protection of Pregnancy"[4] (1978); "Popular Initiative on the Right to Live"[5] (1985), and "Popular Initiative for Mother and Child"/"Federal Law on Abortion" (2002)[6].

With regard to immigration, there are a fairly large number of direct democratic votes at the federal level in the period from 1970 to 2007. In order to keep the project manageable, we had to make a selection of direct democratic votes. Criteria for selection were the importance of the vote as well as different political constellations surrounding these votes, namely a divide between left and right wing political parties or a divide between radical right movements and all other political parties. Our goal was to obtain a sample which reflects both importance of the vote and the diversity of political constellations. We selected the following direct democratic votes: "Popular Initiative against Immigration (Schwarzenbach-Initiative)"[7] (1970), "Initiative for a new immigration policy"[8] (1981),

[3] "Volksinitiative für die Fristenlösung"
[4] "Bundesgesetz über den Schutz der Schwangerschaft und die Strafbarkeit des Schwangerschaftsabbruchs"
[5] "Volksinitiative Recht auf Leben"
[6] "Volksinitiative für Mutter und Kind – für den Schutz des ungeborenen Kindes und für die Hilfe an seine Mutter in Not" (Initiative für Mutter und Kind)/Gesetz über den Schwangerschaftsabbruch (Fristenlösung)
[7] "Volksbegehren gegen die Überfremdung (Schwarzenbach-Initiative)"

"Asylum and Immigration Law"[9] (1987), "Popular Initiative for the Regulation of Immigration (18% Initiative)"[10] (2000), and "Federal Law on Foreigners"/"Asylum Law Revision"[11] (2 issues) (2006).

In order to collect the claims and argumentations of religious groups, we relied upon *political claims analysis* (PCA). While *PCA* has been developed in the context of new social movements, it is ideally suited to capture claim-making of religious groups as well. PCA uses newspapers as a systematic source for identifying claims of groups (Koopmans and Statham 1999). It has two distinct strengths (see Giugny and Passy 2002): first, it allows to collect a wide variety of claims in the public sphere, including established and marginal groups. Second, it allows to analyze the content of claims and arguments in a detailed fashion. In our study, we focused on all interventions made by religious actors in the public sphere in a pre-defined time frame, namely three months prior to a vote as well as two weeks after the vote. The interventions comprise press releases, interviews, letters to the editor, as well as political ads. With regard to the secular media, we focused on three Swiss quality newspapers – "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", "Tagesanzeiger", and "Tribune de Genève". With regard to the internal press of the religious groups, we focused on a wide variety of newspapers comprising all religious communities (Catholics, Protestants, Christ-Catholics, Free Churches, Jewish, and Muslims). In addition, we also conducted a wide-ranging internet-search as well as archival research to complement our data set.

Measuring Explicit Religiosity

Measuring religious reasons is no easy task. Audi (2000) argues that there are two criteria for capturing the essence of secular and religious reasons. First, a secular reason is "roughly one whose normative force, that is, its status as a prima facie justificatory element, does not evidentially depend on the existence of God (or on denying it) or on theological considerations, or on the pronouncement of a person or institution qua religious authority." (p. 89). Second, and less importantly, a secular reason must be complemented by a *secular motivation*, i.e., religious actors must be sincere or truthful when they refer to secular reasons.

While Audi's first criterion provides a useful way of empirically distinguishing between religious and secular reasons (see below), we think that in the context of *PCA* it is very difficult to conceive of religiosity in motivational terms as well. First, to judge whether actors have a religious or secular motivation is to make a judgment about a person's true versus stated preferences. This is exceedingly difficult, since the true preferences are not directly observable. The speculative nature of such a judgment is bound to introduce large amounts of (possibly systematic) measurement error. Second, as mentioned before, arguing in public sphere and in the context of direct democratic votes also creates strong

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[8] "Mitenand-Initiative für eine neue Ausländerpolitik"

[9] "Asyl- und Ausländergesetz"

[10] "Volksinitiative für eine Regelung der Zuwanderung (18% Initiative)"

[11] "Bundesgesetz über die Ausländerinnen und Ausländer (AuG)/Änderung des Asylgesetzes"

incentives for strategic arguing (also for religious actors). The strategic nature of the context reinforces the problem of making a clear-cut empirical distinction between strategic and true preferences.

Thus, in order to operationalise explicit religiosity we only used Audi's first criterion and dropped his second one. In concrete, we focused on "religious markers" which secular persons (or, atheists) would immediately recognise as religious argumentation. Religious markers involve words like "Jesus", "God", "Bible", Bible cites (such as „Ten Commandments") and references to religious authorities. We created a first indicator of explicit religiosity measuring whether a text contains a religious marker (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). This is based on the assumption that a single religious marker creates a religious framing for the whole text.

However, this operationalisation does not take into account that a statement might be framed in a more or less religious fashion. To do so, we created an additional indicator measuring the *degree* of explicit religiosity, ranging from 1 (no religiosity) to 5 (high religiosity). A value of 1 indicates "no religiosity" (and represents the value of 0 of our first indicator of explicit religiosity; see above); a value of 2 indicates "low religiosity"; a value of 3 indicates "medium religiosity"; a value of 4 indicates "high religiosity", and a value of 5 indicates "very high religiosity". We use this second indicator of religiosity mainly as a control (results for the statistical analyses are reported in Appendix 1).

Let us give two examples to clarify our coding procedures. A first example is indicative of a high degree of explicit religiosity (coded 1 for the first indicator of explicit religiosity and 5 for the second indicator). In the abortion debate of 1984, the "Association of Pentecostal Free Churches of Switzerland" (*Bund Pfingstlicher Freikirchen der Schweiz*) made the following statement: "Both in the Old and the New Testament, live is under God's protection. Man is predestined to restore the community with the creator again, via the redemption through Jesus Christ. Man is assigned to serve God with his life. Thus, any measure to shorten or end human life is not only a violation of the biological order, but also of God's will."[12]

A second example is indicative of a purely secular argumentation of a religious actor (coded 0 for our first indicator of explicit religiosity and 1 for the second indicator). In the abortion debate of 2002, the Swiss Catholic Women's Association (*Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund*) made the following statement: „The decision of a

[12] "Im Alten wie im Neuen Testament steht das Leben unter dem göttlichen Schutz. Der Mensch ist dazu bestimmt, durch die Erlösungstat Jesu Christi die Gemeinschaft mit dem Schöpfer wiederzufinden. Er ist berufen, ihm mit seinem Leben zu dienen. Jeder Eingriff zur Verkürzung oder Beendigung des menschlichen Lebens ist somit nicht nur ein Angriff auf die biologische Ordnung, sondern auch auf den Heilswillen Gottes."

woman/couple in favor or against the child is always a question of ethics. … As a morally responsible actor, the woman/couple are responsible to her/their conscience."[13]

We analysed about 800 public statements of religious actors in fifteen direct-democratic votes in Switzerland in the period from 1970-2007. We found very respectable reliability scores for the two measures of religiosity: the ratios of coder agreement (RCA) are .74 for the first (and binary) indicator of explicit religiosity and .68 for the second indicator.

Finally, we acknowledge that there may be more fine-grained ways to capture explicit religiosity. For instance, several philosophers (e.g., Lafont, 2007) have mentioned that the Rawlsian translation proviso is accomplished when religious actors make a *parallel reference* to religious and secular reasons. While this makes sense from a philosophical perspective, it is quite tricky to translate this conception into empirical research: in our sample, we hardly a found a text by a religious actor where the criterion of parallel referencing to religious and secular reasons is *not* fulfilled. In our view, what matters much more is the *religious – or, non-religious - framing* of secular arguments. In this regard, our two indicators exactly capture this essential aspect of religious vs. secular reasoning. As such, we think that our two indicators provide an acceptable first stab to get hold of religious and secular argumentation in a large-scale quantitative analysis.

Predictor Variables

As to predictor variables, we focus on different issues (abortion vs. immigration), different media channels (religious vs. secular press), different media genres (statements, comments, letters to the editor, interviews, political ads), different religious groups (Catholics, Protestants, Christ-Catholics, Free Churches, Jewish, and Muslim communities, non-denominational associations, associations of religious and non-religious actors, common statements of different religious actors (non-denominational statements), and common statements of religious and non-religious actors), internal diversity of religious groups (national leadership organisations, regional leadership organisations, regional and local level associations and movements, specific actors according to issue (women organisation in the case of abortion and charity organisations in case of immigration, as well as other actors (such as association of foreigners or actors from education and universities)), organised vs. private actors, and time period (whereby we focus on the different direct democratic votes). In addition, we also control for the timing of the newspaper article (i.e., how many days the text was publish in advance (or, after the vote), length of the article (measured in terms of words)). Table 1 gives an overview of the specific codes we used for the predictor as well as the outcome variables (explicit religiosity).

[13] "Der Entscheid einer Frau/eines Paares für oder gegen das Kind ist letztlich immer eine Frage der Ethik. … Als moralisch verantwortlich handelnde ist die Frau/das Paar verpflichtet ihrem/seinem Gewissen zu folgen."

Table 1: Overview of the Variables

Dependent Variables	
Explicit Religiosity I	Dummy variable specifying whether there is religious marker in a statement
Explicity Religiosity II	Indicator measuring the degree of religiosity, ranging from 1 (no religiosity) to 5 (high religiosity)
Predictor Variables	
Votes	Dummy variables for the various direct democratic votes
Media Channel	Dummy variable for internal press (coded 1) and for secular press (coded 0)
Media Genre	Dummy variables for press statement (reference category), comment, letter to the editor, interview, political ad, other
Religious communities (horizontal classification)	Dummy variables for Catholics (reference category), Protestants, Christ-Catholics, Free Churches, Jewish Communities, Muslim Communities, non-denominational associations, associations of religious and non-religious actors, non-denominational statements, and combined statements of religious and non-religious actors
Religious communities (vertical classification)	Dummy variables for national leadership (reference category), regional leadership, regional level, associations, other actors, and specific actors (women's organisations and charity organisations)
Organized actors vs. private actors	Dummy variable for religious actors with formal position (coded 1) and for religious citizens (coded 0)
Timing	Days in advance and after vote
Article Length	Number of words (average number of words per line multiplied with the number of lines)

Statistical Analysis

The multivariate statistical analysis is conducted in a Bayesian framework (see Gill, 2007; Gelman et al., 2003; Jackman, 2010). For our data, a Bayesian framework has several advantages compared to widely used frequentist methods in statistical analysis. First, Bayesian analysis makes inferences conditional on the actual sample. This is in stark contrast to frequentist statistics, which the social sciences usually do in the Neyman-Pearson framework, where inference is made to some hypothetical super-population from which repeated samples akin to ours could be drawn. Given the non-random selection of our direct democratic votes, we think that Bayesian inference is more consistent with our data collection process. Second, several independent variables perfectly predict our binary outcome variable (religious vs. secular argumentation). In a frequentist framework, the use of logistic techniques poses severe problem under such conditions: the independent variables that perfectly predict the outcome are dropped from the statistical analysis. This,

however, is unfortunate since perfect predictions are an interesting phenomenon from a theoretical perspective and should not be excluded simply for technical reasons. By contrast, in a Bayesian framework, perfect predictions pose no problem for logistic techniques.

While a Bayesian framework encourages incorporating prior knowledge, we refrain from such an undertaking. Since there is very little knowledge from prior studies at hand, we use fairly conservative and only weakly-informative priors on the unknown parameters of the regression model. More specifically, we follow Gelman et al.'s (2008) advice and use heavy-tailed Gauchy priors with center 0 and scale 2.5 after rescaling all non-binary variables to have mean 0 and standard deviation .5. The Gauchy prior has nice shrinkage properties making estimates conservative and the resulting Bayesian regression model can be estimated using standard software. All models were estimated using the "bayesglm" procedure from the arm (Gelman and Hill, 2007) package for the R statistical language (2009). An advantage of "bayesglm" is that it does not rely on Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) approximations for the posterior distribution but incorporates an approximate EM algorithm into the usual iterative least squares algorithm to update the intercept and slope coefficients at each step using augmented regression to represent the information provided through the priors. Hence, "bayesglm" is a very fast, easy to use, and tuning-free algorithm which frees the user completely from running convergence diagnostics required for any MCMC-based analysis. For our binary indicator of explicit religiosity, we used a logistic model; for our categorical indicator of explicit religiosity, we used a linear model.[14]

The results presented in the following section are the posterior distributions for the estimated coefficients for each covariate. While the dots represent the mean of the posterior distribution, the short thick lines correspond to the 50% credible intervals, while the long thin lines correspond to the 95% credible intervals. Credible intervals are the Bayesian analogue of confidence intervals in frequentist statistics. To facilitate the interpretation, all results are presented in a graphical manner (numerical estimates are available upon request).

Results

Tables 2 and 3 take a first stab at the raw data. Table 2 shows that in the abortion debate, 61 percent percent of all statements of religious groups contain a reference to religious markers while 39 percent do not. In the immigration debates, the amount of explicit religious vocabulary is even lower, hovering at 46 percent. With regard to the *degree* of explicit religiosity, the figures in both abortion and immigration debates indicate a low degree of religiosity, with mean scores hovering around 2.1 (abortion debates) and 1.8

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[14] One may wonder why we did not apply a multilevel statistical approach for data analysis. We decided against a multilevel approach, for the following reasons: on the one hand, there are a high number of potential levels of analysis (issues, groups, media type). On the other hand, we are also confronted with very few cases at the higher levels of analysis as well as with a high degree of cross-classification (i.e., the same actors make statements in multiple non-nested media and issue contexts). This makes it exceedingly difficult obtain reliable estimates in multilevel analysis (especially in the context of binary logistic analyses).

(immigration debates). These results are indicative of a predominantly secular pattern of argumentation which corresponds to the classic liberal approach. However, the picture gets more nuanced when distinguishing between religious leadership organisations and grassroot organisations. National and regional leadership organisations (such as the Swiss Conference of Catholic Bishops) – the publicly most visible religious actors - clearly use more religious vocabulary than grass-root organisations: in the abortion debates, leadership organisation use a religious marker in 74 percent of the cases, whereas the respective amount in the immigration debates is about 61 percent. But when focusing on the *degree* of explicit religiosity, our data show that even religious leadership organisations (national and regional leadership combined) very rarely employ a high degree of explicit religiosity: in the abortion debates, categories 4 and 5 (indicating a high degree of explicit religiosity) are only used in about 8.5 percent of the cases; in the immigration debates, category 4 (high religiosity) is only used in about 2 percent of the cases (while we find no instance of category 5 (very high religiosity). Thus, the strong secular frame of argumentation does not wither away when taking religious leadership into account. Besides, we detect that there are also differences in argumentative patterns among religious groups. In the abortion debates, Catholics have the lowest score of religiosity while Free Churches have the highest score. In the immigration debates, there are similar differences among the different religious groups, albeit the differences are less pronounced than in the abortion debates. Let us now turn to the multivariate analyses, controlling for the effects of other factors such as media channel, media genre, or time.

Table 2: Explicit religiosity in abortion debates

Abortion		All religious groups	Catholic Church	Protestant Church	Free Churches	Leadership Organi-zations (national and regional)
Explicit Religiosity I	No	39.1%	47.3%	34.1%	13.2%	36.5%
	Yes	60.9%	52.7%	65.9%	86.8%	73.5%
Explicit Religiosity II	Mean scores (1 (no religiosity) to 5 (high religiosity)	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.8	2.3

N=284

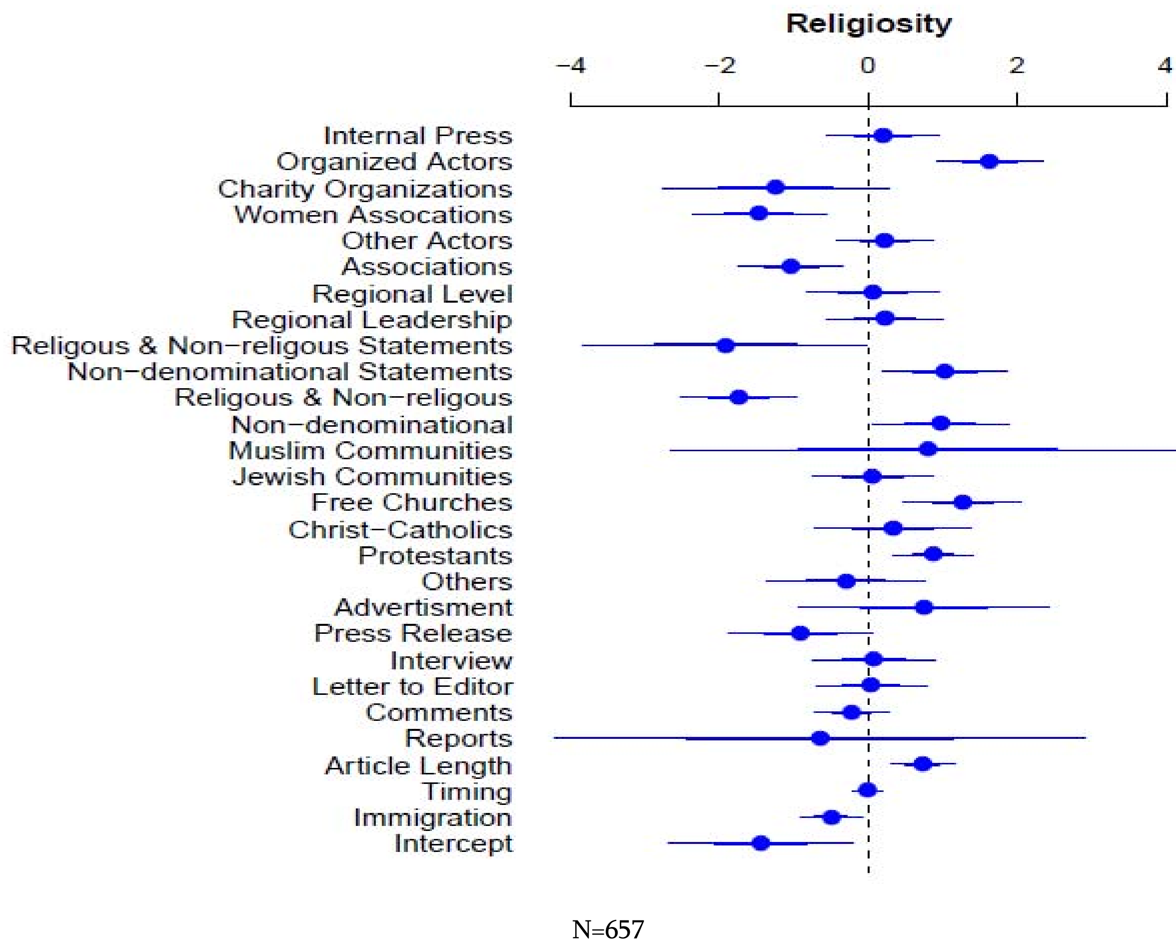
Table 3: Explicit religiosity in immigration debates

Immigration		All religious groups	Catholic Church	Protestant Church	Free Churches	Leadership Organi-zations (national and regional)
Explicit Religiosity I	No	54.1%	54.1%	33.7%	42.9%	39.4%
	Yes	45.9%	45.9%	66.3%	57.1%	60.6%
Explicit Religiosity II	Mean scores (1 (no religiosity) to 5 (high religiosity)	1.8	1.8	2.1	2.2	2.0

N=373

The multivariate statistical analyses largely corroborate the above findings. The first model (see figure 1) compares the different issues, namely abortion vs. immigration for our first (binary) indicator of explicit religiosity. In accordance with our theoretical expectation, abortion debates entail a higher level of religious argumentation than immigration debates. This effect is statistically significant (i.e., the 95% credible intervals do not include zero). In this statistical model, however, we do not interpret the effects of the actor-related variables, since these play out differently according to the different issues (see analyses below).

Figure 1: Predicting Explicit Religiosity in Abortion and Immigration Debates



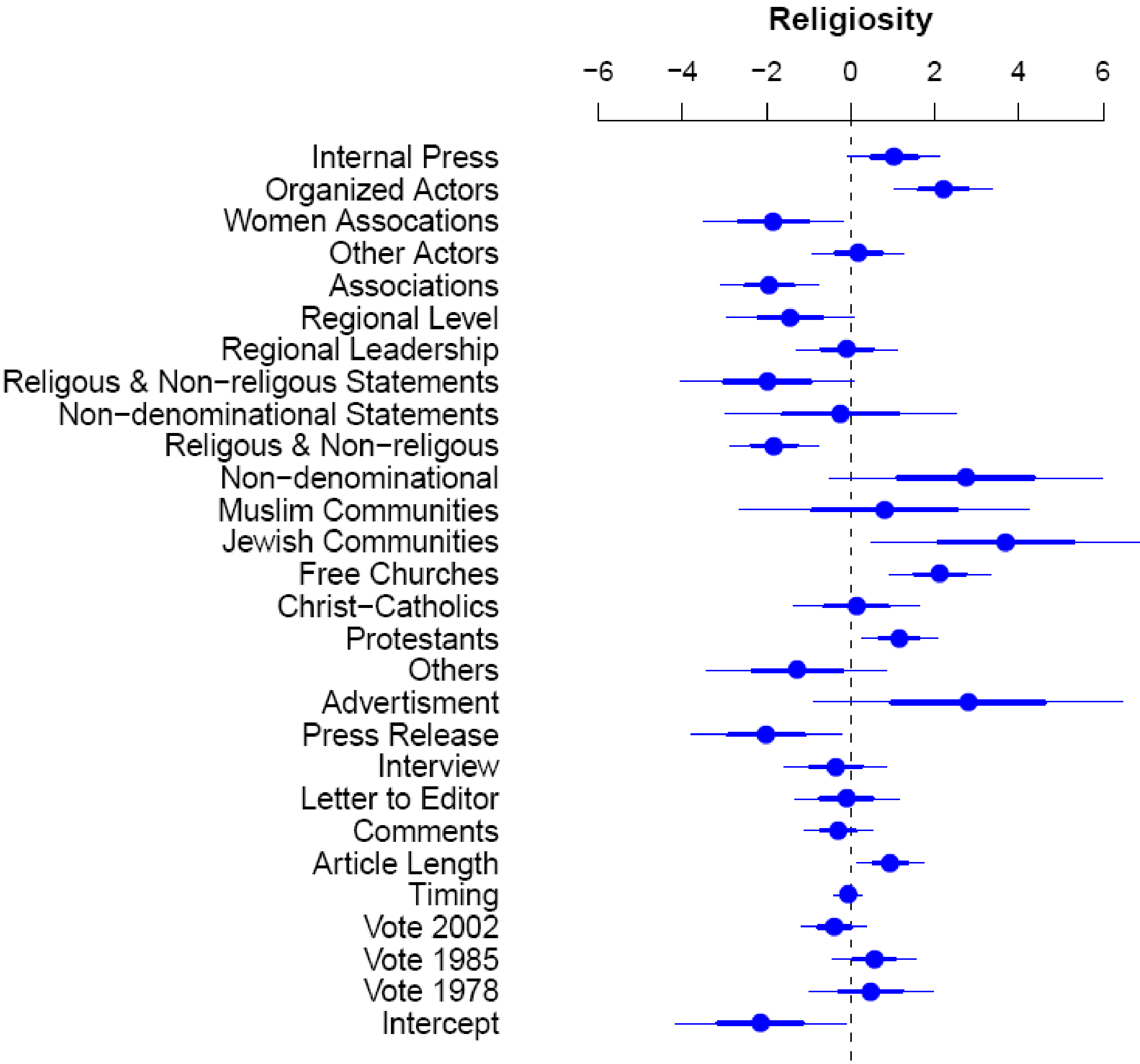
N=657

Focusing on the separate analysis for *abortion* (see figure 2) we see that both context and actor characteristics matter for explicit religiosity. First, different media channels and media genres matter: as expected, explicit religiosity is higher in the religious press tha n in the secular press. Second, religious groups use less religious argumentation in the mediated channel of press statements (serving as the reference category) than in unmediated channels such as political ads; however, there is no statistically discernable effect for letters to the editors (representing a less mediated communication channel as well). Second, religious traditions matter. As expected, the Catholic Church (forming the reference category in the analysis) uses religious vocabulary less frequently than Protestants, Free Churces, Jewish and Muslim communities. As we argued before, the Catholic Church has a natural rights discourse which eases the secular translation of religious arugments. Conversely, other religious groups – Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and especially Free Churches are strongly anchored in their theological traditions, leading them to use religious reasons more frequently. However, our two indicators of explicit religiosity do not yield the same results here. While the first indicator of religiosity displays a statistically discernible difference between Catholics and Protestants, the second indicator does not (see figure 5 in Appendix 1). Yet, both indicators of explicit

religiosity show that there is clear difference between the Catholic Church and Free Churches. In addition, when religious actors align with secular actors, explicit religiosity goes down; conversely, when religious actors act in common (common organisation or common statement), there is a slight tendency of explicit religiosity to go up (however, the 95% credible interval does not fully exclude zero[15]). Third, the internal diversity of religious groups matters as well: in line with our expectations, more secular oriented associations, movements and women associations use less religious vocabulary than the national leadership organisations of religious groups. This effect is statistically significant (i.e., the 95% credible interval does not include zero). Moreover, we find a higher amount of religious argumentation for organised religious actors compared to private ones. Fourth, when focusing on the effects of the different votes from 1970 to 2002, we detect a slight trend in direction of more secular argumentation. This effect, however, is not fully in the 95% credible interval. Finally, the two control variables yield mixed results: while article length is positively associated with explicit religiosity, there is no discernible effect for the timing of the newspaper article (i.e., how many days the text was published in advance (or, after) the vote).

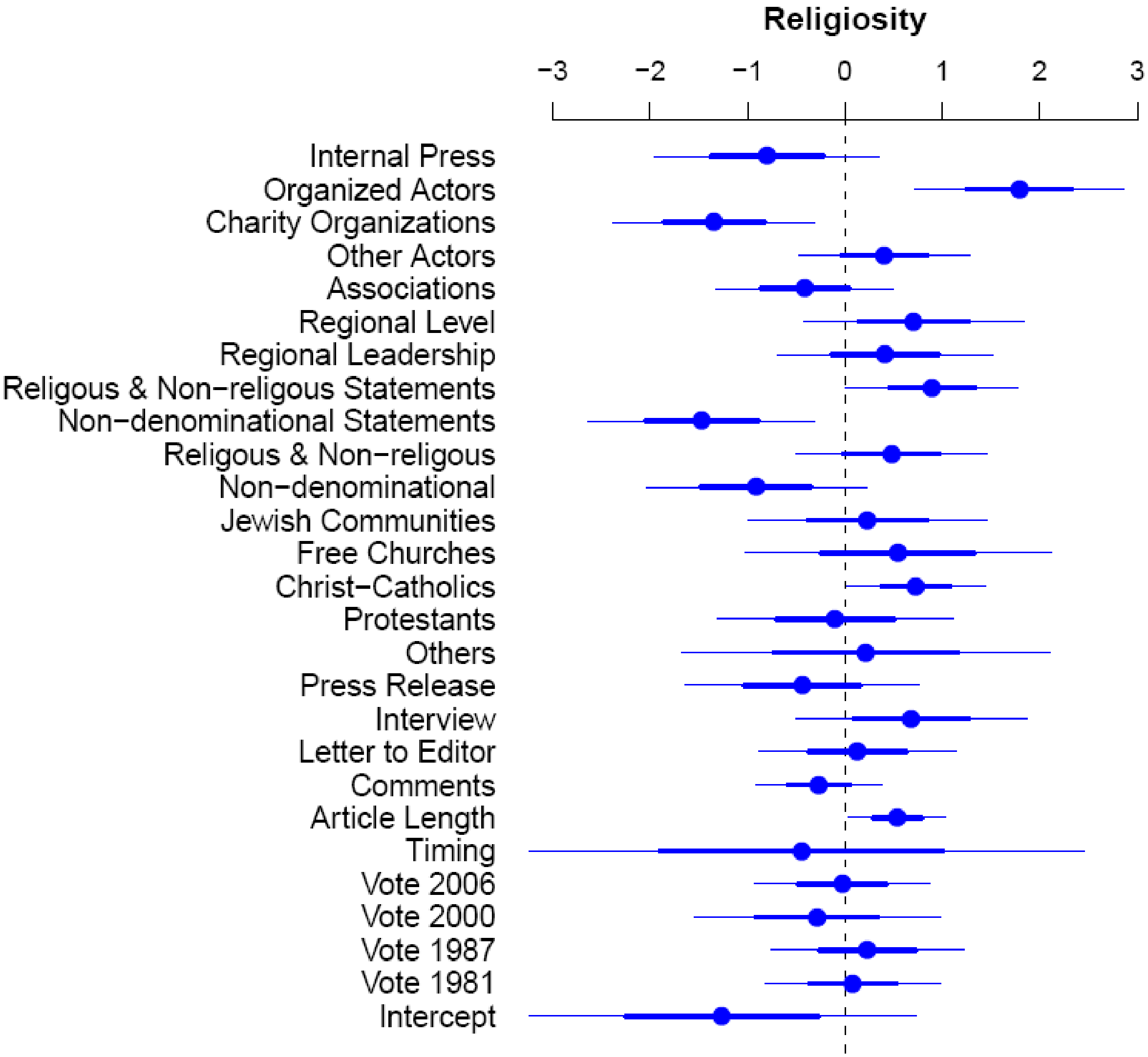
[15] Focusing on the *degree* of explicit religiosity, we even find a positive and statistically significant effect for common organisation and common statements of religious actors (see figure 5 in Appendix 1).

Figure 2: Predicting Explicit Religiosity in Abortion Debates



N=284.

Figure 3: Predicting Explicit Religiosity in Immigration Debates



N=373.

The immigration debates display a different pattern of religious argumentation (see figure 3). First, a number of contextual and actor-centric factors yield different effects compared to the abortion debates. First, different media channels (religious vs. secular press) do not really matter in the context of immigration debates: compared to the abortion debates there is even a slight reverse trend with explicit religiosity scoring higher in the secular press than in the internal press. Since the credible interval does not exclude zero, we do not strongly interpret this finding. Furthermore, different media genres do not matter: there are no statistically significant differences between press statements (serving as the reference category) and other media genres (notice that there are also no political ads of religious actors in the immigration debates). Second, and most significantly, religious traditions do not matter either. There are no discernible differences among the different

religious groups (an exception are Christ-Catholics who use more religious vocabulary than the Catholics (forming the reference category in the analysis). In addition, when religious actors align with secular actors, there is a slight tendency of explicit religiosity to go up; conversely, when religious actors act together (in a common organisation or common statement), there is a slight tendency of explicit religiosity to go down. This is in stark contrast with the abortion debates where we obtained opposite results. However, since the 95% credible intervals for several of these covariates do not fully exclude zero, we do not strongly interpret these findings.[16] Nonetheless, these results tend to underline the strong importance of the (issue) context for the argumentation mode of religious actors. Third, and similar to the abortion debates, internal diversity of religious groups matters: more secular oriented associations, movements and charity associations use less religious vocabulary than the national leadership organisations of religious groups. This effect is statistically significant (i.e., the 95% credible interval does not include zero). Moreover – and in line with the results on abortion -, we find a higher amount of religious argumentation for organized religious actors compared to private ones. Fifth, time does not matter for variation in religious argumentation. There is no discernible trend for the different votes from 1970 to 2006. This is surprising since the different votes also entail different political constellations (left-wing vs. right-wing actors and radical right vs. all other actors). Finally, the two control variables yield mixed results: while article length is positively associated with explicit religiosity, the timing of the newspaper article does not yield any discernible effect.

In sum, our findings reveal an interesting gap: on the one hand, many political philosophers and religious thinkers have moved to a post-classical liberal position where religious actors can – and should - openly employ religious arguments and do not have to translate their deepest beliefs and motivations into some putatively universal neutral secular language. On the other hand, as the Swiss case reveals, the practice of religious groups and actors is different. Especially the large denominations of Catholics and Protestants have a tendency to use a large amount of secular vocabulary. In addition, our findings also reveal that the use of religious or secular reason varies considerably according to different issues, different arenas (religious vs. secular press), different religious traditions, and different media genres, while there is no clear time trend. As such, it is wrong to see religious vs. secular argumentation as a uniform phenomenon.

V. Conclusion

While the use of religious and secular reason represents a major topic in political philosophy, no systematic empirical analyses have been conducted on this topic. Focusing on direct democratic votes in Switzerland on abortion and immigration (1970-2006), we

[16] Moreover, the results for the *degree* of explicit religiosity do not match the above findings; here, the *degree* of explicit religiosity goes up when religious actors align with secular ones, while there is no statistically discernible effect for common organisation and common statements of religious actors (see figure 6 in Appendix 1).

detect some intriguing patterns of argumentation. First, religious actors in the Swiss context use far less religious arguments than one might commonly surmise. When going public, religious actors largely abide by the secular norms of public discourse. From a classic liberal perspective, these results are highly satisfying: most religious groups – especially the large denominations of Catholics and Protests – make a serious translation effort and thus fulfill their democratic role in the public sphere. In case of immigration debates, the majority of religious groups' statements is even made in purely secular terms. From a post-liberal and communitarian perspective, these results are more problematic: by abiding by the secular norms of public discourse, religious actors may partly miss their deliberative role in the public sphere (see Carter, 1993). According to this perspective, religious groups should not only be allowed to bring their religiosity into the public discourse but even make a dedicated effort to do so. To be sure, one can argue by "going public", religious actors (and especially their leadership organisations) almost automatically bring their religiosity into public discourse. From a communitarian perspective, however, the fact that religious actors frequently abstain from using any religious vocabulary mutilates this role and turns religious actors into any civic actor. Second, our study also shows that there is considerable variation in the argumentative strategies of religious groups. Specific context and actor characteristics affect the way of how religious actors argue in public sphere. Especially issue type, religious traditions, and internal diversity turn out to be strong drivers of different argumentation patterns (religious vs. secular reasoning). Third, a surprising result of this study is that time barely matters: while we detected a slight trend towards more secular argumentation in the context of the abortion debates, there is no general time trend towards a more secular discourse. In other words, even though society has changed, the public discourse of religious groups has not changed (much).

Of course, our study is not without limitations. First, future research will need to look beyond the specifics of the Swiss case and engage in comparative analysis. Especially a comparison with a less secular society such as the United States might yield interesting results. Second, we also need to shed light on the question of how citizens – religious as well as secular citizens – evaluate the going public of religious groups. Do they accept when religious groups follow the current philosophical mainstream and used more religious vocabulary in the public sphere? Or do they oppose this trend and expect that religious groups act like any civic actor when going public? Survey results from the *European Values Study* (2005-2007) show that about two thirds of interviewed citizens in Europe are opposed to a strong influence of religious leaders in public affairs. Thus, religious actors going public might be well advised to keep their fairly liberal mode of argumentation in the public sphere. Third, future research will also need to look beyond religious vs. secular argumentation. Cristina Lafont (2007), for instance, proposes a deliberative approach to religion in the public sphere whereby the key is "inclusive accountability". In this conception, religious citizens must not abstain from using religious arguments. Their only obligation is to present persuasive reasons why secular counterarguments are wrong. At the same time, Lafont's deliberative approach also requires that religious citizens must grapple with secular arguments: "a successful policy of inclusive accountability requires combining the right to include the cognitive stances of

all democratic citizens with the need to provide generally acceptable reasons for the coercive political decisions with which all citizens must comply." (p. 255) These limitations notwithstanding, our empirical study on argumentation modes of religious actors in the context of Swiss direct democratic votes breaks new ground on a topic which has been primarily studied from a normative angle. It shows that a systematic engagement between empirical and normative studies can yield results that raise further questions, both for philosophers and religious actors (and campaigners) alike. We think that our findings should induce reflection both among philosophers and religious actors of how argumentation modes of religious actors *should* look like – and how they *can* look like under the constraints of real world politics such as direct democratic campaigns. Both camps need to re-think how a deliberative role of religious groups in the communitarian sense can be aligned with the necessities of strategic framing in political campaigning.

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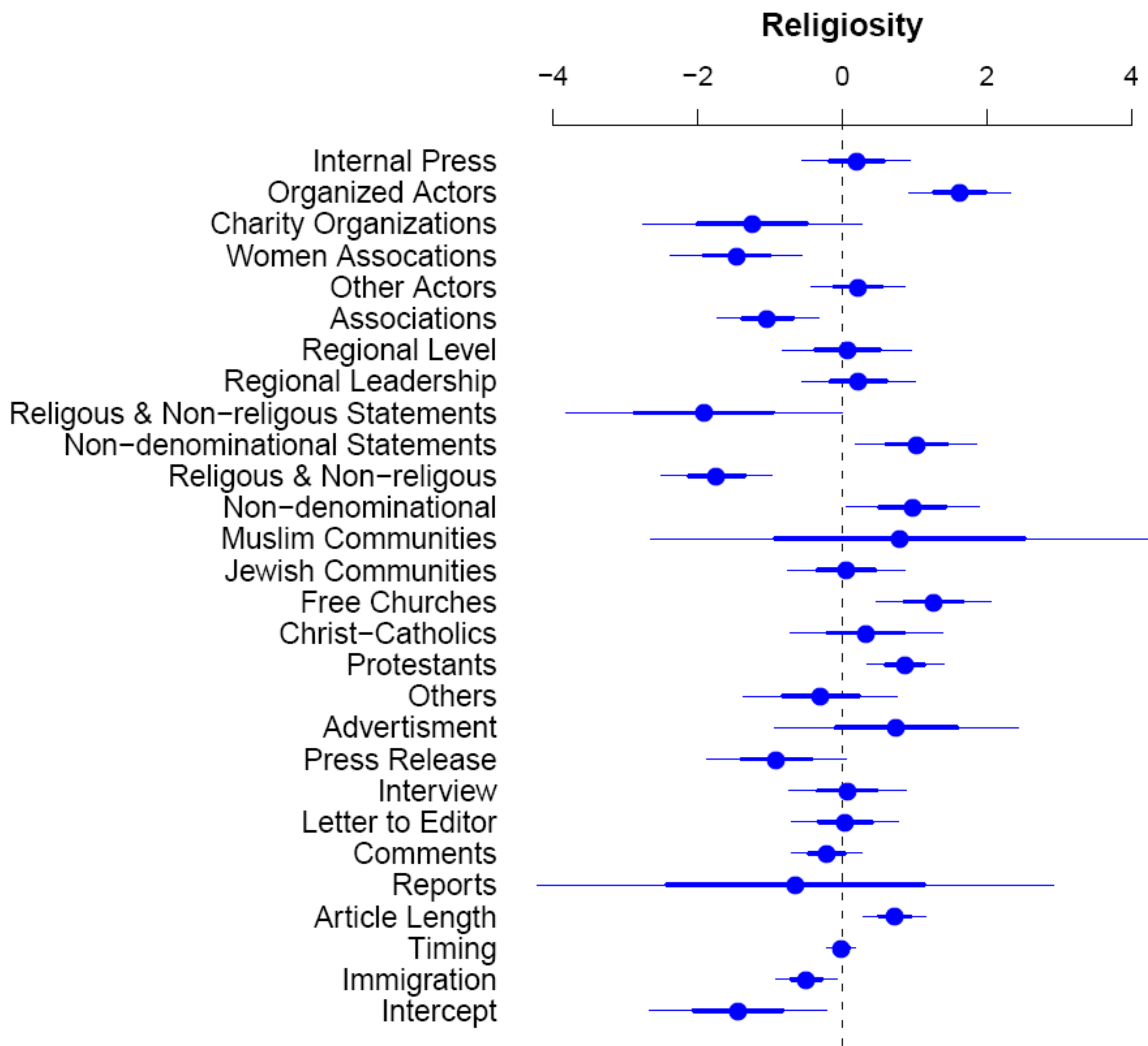
Appendix 1

Figure 4: Predicting Explicit Religiosity II (degree of religiosity) in Abortion and Immigration Debates



N=657

Figure 5: Predicting Explicit Religiosity II (degree of religiosity) in Abortion Debates

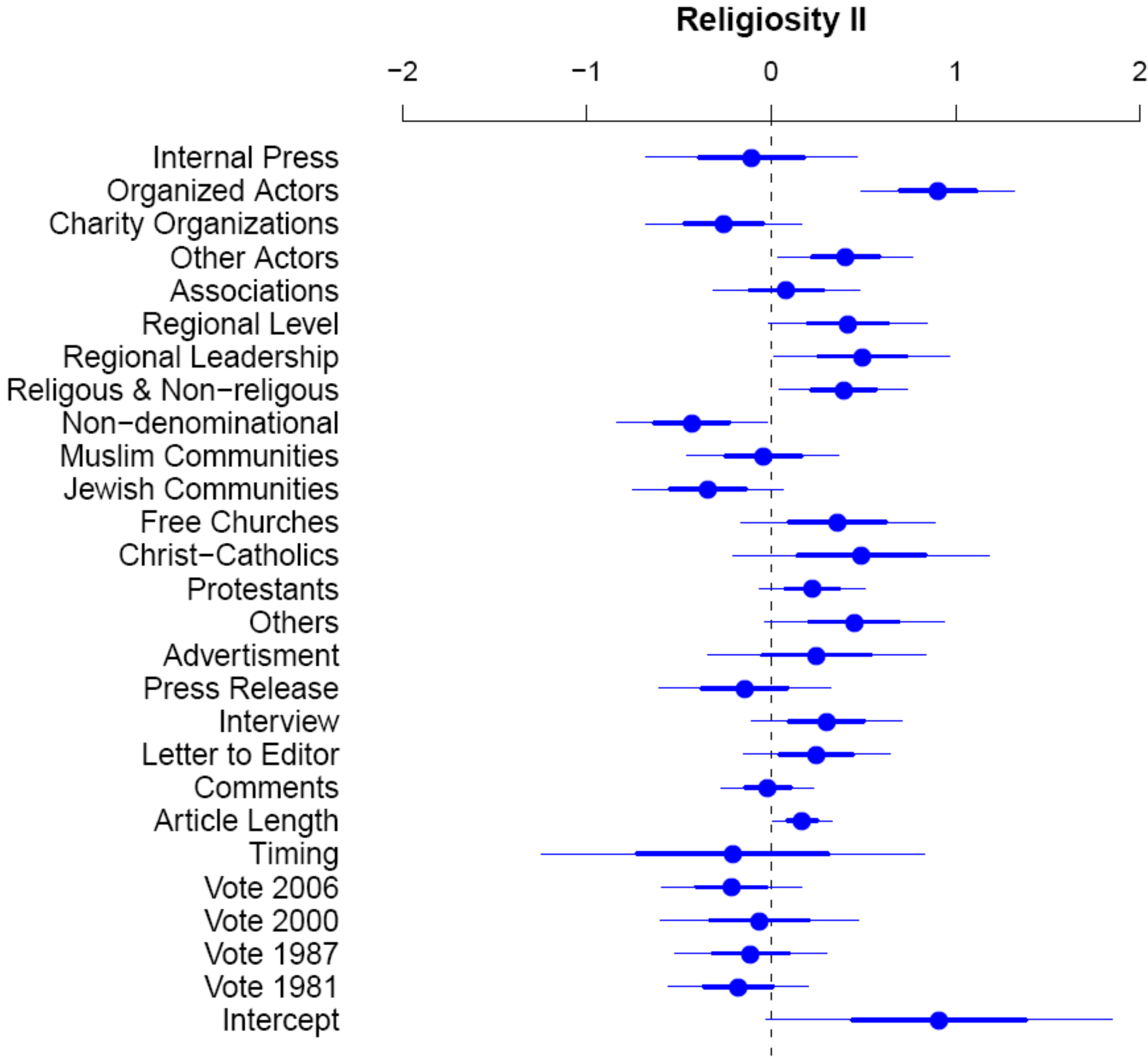


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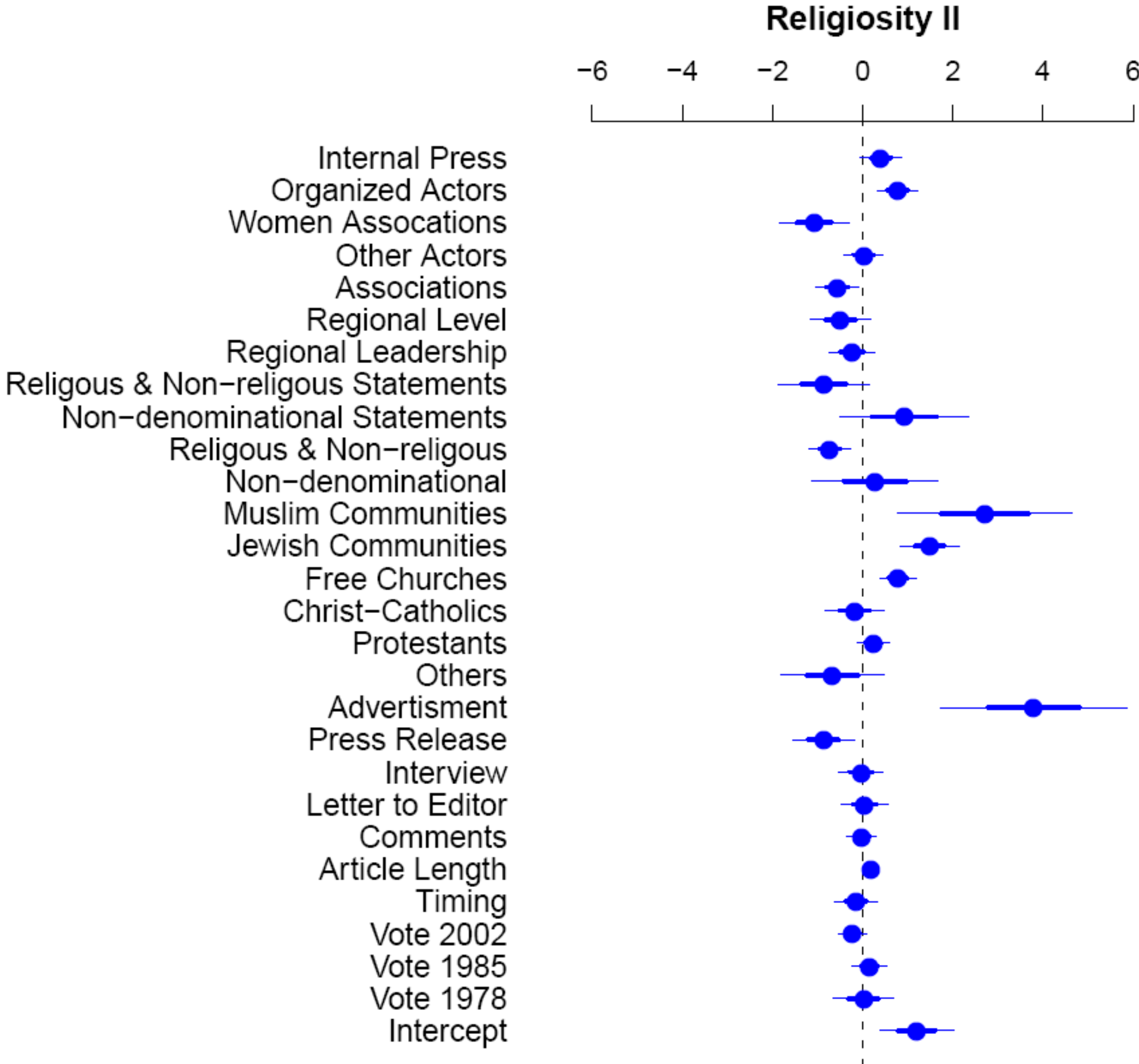
Figure 6: Predicting Explicit Religiosity II (degree of religiosity) in Immigration Debates



N=373.